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 IST 663: Integrating Motivation & Information Literacy
 Lesson Plan #2
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Lesson Title: Secret Letters: Messages During the Revolutionary War

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Brief Description: Students are currently reading “Toliver’s Secret” in language arts and studying the Revolutionary War in social studies. In the book, 11-year old Ellen Toliver is asked by the Patriots to deliver an important message for General Washington, which is hidden in a loaf of bread. Students will be “recreating” Ellen’s mission by creating a fictional character and write a “coded” letter that is based on facts they have learned/researched about the War. The letters will then be decoded by their classmates.

Information Literacy Skills

Definition:

- Determining the amount and type of information needed to complete the task or assignment.

Planning:

- Identifying potential information sources.

Exploration

- Exploring a range of information resources.

Collection:

- Selecting more relevant information resources.
- Locating relevant information within selected resources.
- Extracting information from selected resources.

Organization:

- Summarizing and synthesizing gathered information.
- Organizing information for presentation.

Presentation:

- Presenting results.

Evaluation:

- Evaluating the end product.

Information Literacy Standards

1. Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.

Skills

1.1.2: Use prior and background knowledge as context for new learning.

1.1.4: Find, evaluate, and select appropriate sources to answer questions.

Dispositions in Action

1.2.2: Demonstrate confidence and self-direction by making independent choices in the selection of resources and information.

1.2.3: Demonstrate creativity by using multiple resources and formats.

2. Draw conclusions, make informed decisions, apply new knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.

Skills

2.1.1: Continue an inquire-based research process by applying critical-thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, evaluation, organization) to information and knowledge in order to construct new understandings, draw conclusions, and create new knowledge.

2.1.2: Organize knowledge so that it is useful.

3. Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.

Self-Assessment Strategies

3.4.2: Assess the quality and effectiveness of the learning product.

4. Pursue personal and aesthetic growth.

Skills

4.1.8: Use creative and artistic formats to express personal learning.

Dispositions in Action

4.2.1: Display curiosity by pursuing interests through multiple resources.

Related Subject Areas: Social Studies / English Language Arts

Related Content Standard(s):

Social Studies

Standard 1: History of the United States and New York

Students will use a variety of intellectual skills to demonstrate their understanding of major ideas, eras, themes, developments, and turning points in the history of the United States and New York.

3. Study about the major social, political, economic, cultural, and religious developments in New York State and United States history involves learning about the important roles and contributions of individuals and groups.

- Gather and organize information about the important accomplishments of individuals and groups, including Native American Indians, living in their neighborhoods and communities

- Identify individuals who have helped to strengthen democracy in the United States and throughout the world

4. The skills or historical analysis include the ability to: explain the significance of historical evidence; weigh the importance, reliability, and validity of evidence; understand the concept of multiple causation; understand the importance of changing and competing interpretations of different historical developments.

- Consider different interpretations of key events and/or issues in history and understand the difference in these accounts
- View historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music, and artifacts

English Language Arts

Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding

1. Listening and reading to acquire information and understanding involves collecting data, facts, and ideas: discovering relationships, concepts, and generalizations; and using knowledge from oral, written, and electronic sources.

- Gather and interpret information from children's reference books, magazines, textbooks, electronic bulletin boards, audio and media presentations, oral interviews, and from such forms as charts, graphs, maps, and diagrams
- Select information appropriate to the purpose of their investigation and relate ideas from one text to another
- Select and use strategies that have been taught for notetaking, organizing, and categorizing information
- Make appropriate and effective use of strategies to construct meaning from print, such as prior knowledge about a subject, structural and context clues, and an understanding of letter-sound relationships to decode difficult words

2. Speaking and writing to acquire and transmit information requires asking probing and clarifying questions, interpreting information in one's own words, applying information from one context to another, and presenting the information and interpretation clearly, concisely, and comprehensibly.

- Present information clearly in a variety of oral and written forms such as summaries, paraphrases, brief reports, stories, posters and charts
- Use the process of pre-writing, drafting, revising, and proofreading (the "writing process") to produce well-constructed informational texts

Standard 2: Language for Literacy Response and Expression

2. Speaking and writing for literacy response involves presenting interpretations, analyses, and reactions to the content and language of a text. Speaking and writing for literary expression involves producing imaginative texts that use language and text structures that are inventive and often multilayered.

- Create their own stories, poems and songs using the elements of the literature they have read and appropriate vocabulary

Collaborators: 4th Grade Teachers, Teacher Librarian

Credits: Spy Letters of the American Revolution: From the Collections of the Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan; Teachers' Lounge Classroom Activities (<http://www.si.umich.edu/spies/>)

PURPOSE

Instructional Goals

- Using information they have learned about the Revolutionary War, students will create a fictional historic character, and then write a “coded” letter from that character based on facts they have researched in print and online sources.
- Students will read and “decode” a classmate’s letter and summarize what the letter was about.

Learning Objectives

4th grade students will be able to:

- imagine a fictional character.
- locate at least four appropriate facts for “coded” letters in both print and electronic resources.
- create a method to “code” and successfully complete their letter.

Motivational Goals

- Students creativity and imagination will be reinforced.
- Students will develop confidence in the research process and be satisfied with their accomplishments.
- Students will develop an interest for research.

AUDIENCE

Grade Levels: 4th grade

Number of Students: 20+

Relevant Characteristics

- Students have a wide range of reading levels.
- Students show high potential for creativity in other classroom settings.
- Students have done library research in other classes in the past and are familiar with materials.

Motivational Profile (Incoming Motivational Levels)

Attention: High

Comments: Students will be able to use their creativity and create characters and coding methods of their own. They are enthusiastic about the topic in their Social Studies and English Language Arts classes.

Relevance: High

Comments: Students have been learning about Revolutionary War and spies, and are familiar with the topic.

Confidence: Low, Medium, High

Comments: Although students have successfully completed research projects in the past, they have varying confidence in their research abilities. Some students are also quite timid with sharing their work with their peers. Some students may also be overwhelmed with more difficult coding methods.

Satisfaction Potential: High

Students will be receiving feedback from their classmates on their letters, and will have a clear guide as to what is expected out of the assignment.

CONTENT & TECHNIQUES

Introduction

Show students a letter that arrived in the mail today for the library (letter should be coded in some manner - example: letter_for_library.jpg). Pass the letter around and ask if anyone can make any sense of what the letter is about. Tell students that the information in the letter was meant for only the person it is addressed to, and that person must have some information to crack the code that allows them to read the it.

Explain to students that, just like in *Toliver's Secret*, the British and Colonial Soldiers would intercept the mail to find out what the other side's strategies were for the war, so people found various ways to disguise their messages incase these letters ever got into the wrong hands. In the book, Ellen hid a secret message in a loaf of bread, but there many other ways people disguised their messages.

Tell students the goals of the lesson, describing that they will be creating their own fictional characters and will be exploring the library for real facts that could relate to their character. They are then to write and create their own disguised letter for a classmate to decode and read. Give students a "timeline" of events for the assignment; creating their character, exploring historic facts about their character, writing their letter in "plain text", looking at and discovering coded letter techniques and determining which method they want to use, creating their final letter, then reading a classmates letter for assessment.

Body

Day 1

Do a quick recap and discussion of historical fiction, and what characteristics the genre has. Explain to students how their letter is a form of historical fiction because it is based on real historic events, but the characters are made up.

As a class, brainstorm potential characters they can create as their letter writers. As students come up with characters, write them on a whiteboard or large pad so students can use as a reference. Characters examples are: British Soldier, Colonial Soldier, farmer, student, family member hiding a soldier, blacksmith, nurse, etc.

Pass out worksheet (character.pdf / .doc) where students can work on creating their characters main characteristics. Have a few students share the character information they have created.

Any remaining time can be used to start research (web, print and reference materials).

Day 2

Provide students with a goal for the day, to complete their historic research and have 4 solid facts that they can incorporate into their letters. Students' begin/continue research, and use worksheet for notes. Students are expected to work on and complete their "plain text" letters in their classroom or on their own time.

Day 3

Now that students have completed their letters in "plain text", it is time to figure out how they want to "code" their letters. Guide students through the "Methods" section of the website *Spy Letters of the American Revolution* (<http://www.si.umich.edu/spies/index-lounge.html>), discussing each of the techniques briefly. Then allow students to search spy books, the web or more closely examine the techniques discussed to come up with how they will code their letters.

After students have thought of a technique, they can begin to write their letters. Provide students with plain paper, construction paper, "invisible ink" and writing instruments and scissors.

Completed letters, worksheets and decoding instruction can go in large envelopes and then deposited into a "mail" bag.

Conclusion

Day 4

(Note: Classroom teacher and librarian have removed worksheets from envelopes and left only instructions. Assign each student a number and put that

corresponding number on their letter so student readers don't know who's is who's for assessment)

Provide students with a letter from the “mail bag” to, using the instructions provided, decode, read and asses. Students will fill out an assessment handout (student_assessment.pdf / .doc). Bring the class together and share information they learned from the letters.

Learning Assessment Methods:

Students will have time to share what they have learned from the letters they read, so librarian and teachers can make sure letters were based on historic facts. Both the notes and assessment worksheets that were completed by students will show if students were able to be creative with creating their characters and coding their letters, and again, check historic facts.

Lesson Tips: Have a list of useful web resources on Portaportal or other bookmarking site on letter coding techniques and age-appropriate Revolutionary War sites.